

Redeemer

Ruth

As we continue our journey through the Bible this year we are covering ground more quickly. Last week we touched on the conquest of the land, led by Joshua. Today we look into the time period of the judges.

“In the days *when the judges ruled* there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.” Ruth 1:1

The book of judges describes one of the ***darkest time periods*** in Israel’s history as the nation spiraled down into increasing rebellion and idolatry. The recurring phrase in Judges is “Israel had no king. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” It was a time of chaos, rebellion and sin.

That is the backdrop for one of the most beautiful stories of redemption in the whole Bible - **the story of Ruth**, the Moabitess.

- ***A foreigner*** to the covenants and promises of Israel, a sinful, idolatrous pagan...
- Leaves her foreign land and travels with her Jewish mother-in-law back to Israel where she commits herself to the God of Israel.
- In Bethlehem she “happens” to run into a close relative of her mother-in-law who “happens” to take an interest in her and becomes for her a **KINSMAN REDEEMER**.
- He pays the price to buy back her mother-in-law’s family land and at the same time to take responsibility for this foreign born widow by marrying her.
- ***And so the outsider is brought in***. The sinner becomes righteous. The poor one is richly blessed. The story that begins with death, ends in life. The story that opens in the darkness and chaos of judges ends with the glory and peace of the Davidic Kingdom!

So as we walk through the story of Ruth, ***may we all hear in her story OUR STORY***. For we, too, were all sinners, foreigners and strangers to the promise. But through our Redeemer we have been brought near by the blood of Christ!

We’ll first walk through the story as ***a drama in four acts***, just experiencing the flow of what happened to Naomi and Ruth. Then we will draw out principles to hold onto from this great portrait of redemption!

ACT 1 we will title CHAOS. “In the days the judges ruled there was a famine in the land.” Famines were signs of God’s judgment. When the people failed to keep God’s Law He brought different forms of punishment upon them to draw them back to Himself. Famine was one of those means of testing. ***Let’s meet the cast of characters*** in our drama - verse 2:

ACT 1 - Chaos

“The name of the man was **Elimelech** and the name of his wife **Naomi**, and the names of his two sons were **Mahlon** and **Chilion**. They were Ephrathites from **Bethlehem** in Judah. They went into the country of **Moab** and remained there.” Ruth 1:2

- **Elimelech** means “My God is King” but he did not live like God was sovereign.
- **Naomi** means “sweetness” but quickly became bitter.
- **Mahlon and Chilion** mean “weak and sickly” - not optimistic names for “My God is King and Sweetness” to call their two sons...
- **Bethlehem** means “House of bread.” So the family leaves the house of bread and goes to the neighboring country of **Moab** - a nation that was born from the incestuous relationship of Lot and his daughters and was therefore despised by the Jews and viewed as unclean.

Right away in the first two verses we feel the chaos of the story. Everything is upside down. The names reveal the confusion and desperation of the situation. “They went into the country of Moab and remained there.” That last phrase is very ominous. It’s one thing to escape a famine for a few months. It’s another thing to REMAIN in a foreign, idolatrous land as a long term choice. The loyalty of this family had *shifted from having God as their king to having NO KING at all*. There was chaos in the land and chaos in their lives.

And then Elimelech died.

ACT 1 - Chaos

“But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. *These took Moabite wives*; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years.” Ruth 1:3-4

Since they had chosen to remain in Moab, it was inevitable that “Weak and Sickly” would choose Moabite wives - which they did. This was no small thing. It represented the totality of their departure from the God of Israel. *They were now fully integrated into their new land* by embracing the women - and the GODS - of Moab.

They lived there ten years and then Weak and Sickly both died. (Who could have foreseen that?)

ACT 1 - Chaos

“They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, *so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband*.” Ruth 1:4-5

Sweet Naomi who left Israel with a husband and two sons - signs of great blessing and provision from the Lord - *is now left EMPTY*. Her protection and blessing is gone. Widows in those days were profoundly vulnerable. Suddenly, in one family, there is not just one widow - but THREE! Do you feel the all consuming chaos of this situation? Naomi finds herself enveloped in darkness and despair.

But from this place of ROCK BOTTOM, *Naomi decides to go home*. She hears the famine has lifted in Israel.

“Then she arose with her daughters-in-law **to return** from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.” Ruth 1:6

This word is repeated over and over in chapter 1. It is the Hebrew word for **“repent.”** It means simply to turn back. In this story, it means to come home. Naomi, the prodigal daughter of Israel, has hit her all time low and finally decides to come home.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, **return** each of you to her mother's house... The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Ruth 1:8-9

Naomi has no hope for herself or her daughters-in-law, so she sends them back to their own people to look for new husbands. That was their hope - *to find REST*, protection, blessing - in the arms of another man.

The chaos and darkness of ten years of struggle, rebellion and death in ACT 1 fades into ACT 2 - a single moment on a road in Moab that points west back toward Israel. There on that road Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go back to their own people and gods for Naomi has no hope in her own God.

ACT 2 - Bitterness

“No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” Ruth 1:13

Naomi feels that God has not only abandoned her but that *He has actively worked against her*. Her pain has piled up into deep resentment to the point that when she gets back to her hometown she tells people to change her name from Naomi (sweetness) to Mara (bitterness). And Naomi must have appeared so haggard and depressed that the people struggled to even recognize her when she walked into town - they said, “Is this Naomi?”

But in the midst of that depressing moment, frothing over with Naomi’s bitterness, we see this **remarkable promise** from one of her daughters-in-law.

But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” Ruth 1:16-17

Orpah takes off. She follows Naomi’s bitter advice and trudges back to her own people and gods. But Ruth CLINGS to her bitter Jewish mother-in-law and makes a covenant promise to remain with her no matter what.

It’s clear that ***this vow is not just to Naomi but also to the God of Israel***. This is Ruth’s public commitment to become a Jew. It’s a little odd to read this passage at a WEDDING, as some people do, because it’s spoken from a woman to her mother-in-law, but since wedding vows are **COVENANT vows** it does work as this is Naomi entering a covenant relationship with the LORD, the God of Israel!

So the curtain falls on the first half of the drama with this verse:

ACT 2 - Bitterness

“So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem ***at the beginning of barley harvest.***” Ruth 1:22

In the darkness, chaos, pain and bitterness of Act 1 and 2 we see ***a couple bright rays of light***. One is Ruth, a Moabite clinging to her Jewish Mother-in-law. The other is the timing. They get back to Bethlehem (the house of bread) “at the beginning of barley harvest.” Then we turn the page into Act 3.

ACT 3 - Favor

Now Naomi had ***a relative of her husband's***, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was **Boaz**. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him ***in whose sight I shall find favor.***” Ruth 2:1-2

Names are meaningful in the Bible - here we meet a relative of Naomi whose name means “strength is in him.” He is a worthy man, meaning he has good character - which is no small thing in the days of the judges. Picture ***Jean Valjean in his workshop*** - and in walks Fantine, looking for work.

To understand the rest of the story we have to pause to explain three Jewish laws.

Jewish Laws

1. Gleaning
2. Kinsman-Redeemer

3. Levirate Marriage

Gleaning was a practice designed to provide for poor people - giving them a hand-up without just giving a handout. At harvest time landowners were commanded by God not to harvest every last stalk of grain and ear of corn. They could reap the harvest one time through but not go back to pick up the scraps. Those scraps were intentionally to be left for the poor.

Now if a Jewish person became poor and desperate they could sell their ancestral land as a measure of last resort. As soon as a relative was in a position to buy that land back, they were supposed to do so as a "**Kinsman-Redeemer.**" The idea was to keep the land in the family and the extended family was expected to help in this regard.

Finally, there was the law of **Levirate Marriage**. If my brother died and left no heir and I was single, it was my duty to marry his widow and have children with her. The first child of our union would be HIS child, carrying on his name and inheriting his land.

Now, of all the towns in Israel, they went to Bethlehem. And of all the fields around Bethlehem, Ruth wandered into this one.

ACT 3 - Favor

"So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and ***she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.***" Ruth 2:3

Now for most of us today running into an uncle or cousin does not conjure up the hopes of romance. But in ancient Israel it totally did. Your clan was central to your identity. ***Elimelech was in the line of Judah*** - the line of blessing promised to Abraham and the line that would bring the kings of Israel, as we'll see in just a few minutes. Ruth "happens" to come into the field of Boaz - the land of a close relative.

Now Boaz Valjean quickly notices the new woman in his field - who happens to be quite young and attractive (and single, his research tells him). So he goes out of his way ***to help her in the gleaning process.*** Normally gleaners were barely tolerated. Often they were sent away or even abused. But Boaz commands his harvesters to HELP her!

ACT 3 - Favor

When she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not reproach her. And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her." Ruth 3:15-16

He first made sure no one bothered her. Then he told them to drop things for her - and even let her glean among the SHEAVES - the bundles already gathered! That was gleaning - that would

ordinarily have been called STEALING. Beyond that he said she could drink from the water for Boaz's men and Boaz even invited her to his own TABLE to eat and drink with HIM!

ACT 3 - Favor

Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "***Why have I found favor*** in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" Ruth 3:10

Though she was an unclean OUTSIDER who deserved nothing from him, Boaz treated her like FAMILY. And Ruth recognized this was undeserved favor. This is a picture of GRACE. And listen to how Boaz responds to Ruth's question:

ACT 3 - Favor

"The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, ***under whose wings you have come to take refuge!***" Ruth 3:12

Boaz acknowledges the courage and faith it took for Ruth to leave her homeland, family and gods and come with Naomi - a bitter old woman - back to Israel. Boaz saw this was not just a geographic relocation but **a spiritual relocation**. Ruth had come to the God of Israel to take refuge. And Boaz, a man of sincere faith in His God, said, "God will reward you for that step of faith."

Now, enter the Mother-in-law. Chapter 3.

ACT 3 - Favor

Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, ***should I not seek rest for you***, that it may be well with you? Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? Ruth 3:1-2

So Naomi instructs Ruth to first take a shower and then visit Boaz late at night. This scene will look strange and a little scandalous to us - but be sure to see it for what it is.

ACT 3 - Favor

"And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and ***uncovered his feet and lay down.***" Ruth 3:7

To us this either sounds bizarre or provocative or both. But this little demonstration had a very specific meaning in those days. Listen to how Ruth explains it when Boaz wakes up and is startled to find a person lying at his feet.

ACT 3 - Favor

He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant. ***Spread your wings over your servant***, for you are a redeemer." Ruth 3:9

By laying down at his feet and picking up the corner of his robe and pulling it over herself - Ruth was saying to Boaz, very simply: "MARRY ME." Boaz had prayed a blessing over her that since she had come under God's wings for refuge He would reward her. Now Ruth is saying - "could those wings of blessing under which I have come for refuge be YOURS. Will **you** be my refuge?"

And there is that word **REDEEMER**. "You are a redeemer." It means Boaz was a close relative so he had the right of redemption as a kinsman redeemer. In other words, the ancestral land of Naomi they had sold years before Boaz had the right to buy back for them. But the other law - the law of levirate marriage - was also in play. It would not be right to take the privilege of buying the land without also assuming the responsibility for the widows who went with it.

One preacher pointed out that a Redeemer needed three things: relationship, resources and resolve. He had to have a close enough relationship to have the right of redemption. He had to have the resources to pay the price of redemption. And he had to have the resolve to serve as a redeemer. Boaz had all three.

ACT 3 - Favor

She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for ***the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.***" Ruth 3:18

Naomi sought REST for Ruth. And Boaz will not rest until he resolves the matter of redemption. He goes immediately to the city gate, where business was settled. He gathers ten elders as witnesses and pulls aside the one man who was a closer relative and therefore had the first right of redemption. Boaz explains the situation with the land available to be redeemed and the man quickly jumps on this lucrative business opportunity.

But then Boaz reminds him that with the land comes two widows. At this the man turns away. He wanted the blessing of the land, but not the responsibility of the women. So he takes off his sandal to make the deal official.

ACT 4 - Family

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech... Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife." Ruth 4:9-10

The one in close relationship, with the resources to pay the price moved with resolve to act as her REDEEMER. Boaz purchased the land and in the process paid the price for his bride.

ACT 4 - Family

“So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and *she bore a son.*” Ruth 4:13

The story that started with the death of two sons now ends with the birth of a son. The story that started with bitterness now ends with joy. And the reason there is life instead of death, joy instead of sorrow - is the KINSMAN-REDEEMER.

ACT 4 - Family

Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you *a restorer of life* and a nourisher of your old age.” Ruth 4:14-15

Noami who started sweet but turned bitter has found healing and new life in a Redeemer. But the redeemer referred to in this verse is not Boaz but the BABY.

ACT 4 - Family

And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:17

The story started in the dark days of the judges. But Ruth the Moabitess becomes a key link in the chain leading directly to King David! The foreigner has become FAMILY. The ultimate outsider not only came into Israel and the people of God but is FEATURED in the line of blessing from Abraham to David and on down to Jesus - our true Kinsman-Redeemer!

That is the story of Ruth. Now let’s focus in on this beautiful gospel truth of *The Redeemer*. Jesus, The Ultimate Redeemer, transforms us completely. This story illustrates seven transformations. Let’s look at each one briefly to meditate on the glory of our Redeemer!

The Redeemer Transforms Our

1. Chaos into Peace

“In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land.” (1:1)	“Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.” (4:21-22)
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Ruth provides a beautiful hinge from the darkness, chaos and pain of the judges into the *structure and harmony of the Kingdom*. Granted, the Kingdom would only enjoy unity and blessing for a very short time - but the genealogy here represents the hope of the ultimate peace and unity that the FINAL DAVIDIC KING would bring when he will reign on David’s throne forever, and “of his justice and peace there will be no end.”

The Redeemer Transforms Our

1. Chaos into Peace

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.” Ephesians 2:14

Jesus IS our peace. He reigns at the Father’s right hand in heaven and from there pours out His Spirit to fill us with peace even in the chaos and disorder of this life. He has given us unity and peace in His body even amidst the challenge of loving and serving one another - proud, selfish sinners that we still are.

Second, The Redeemer Transforms our:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

2. Rebellion into Righteousness

“They went into the country of Moab and remained there..” (1:2)	“You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.” (3:10)
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The failure of Elimelech in chapter one gives way to the faith and love of Ruth in chapter 3. Instead of following her fleshly desires and running after the attractive young men, she chose to pursue Boaz, an older man with proven character.

Jesus called us when we were rebels, enslaved to our sins.

The Redeemer Transforms Our

2. Rebellion into Righteousness

“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.” Ephesians 2:11,16

We were defined by our sin - contaminated and fully corrupted by it. We were utterly unclean, like uncircumcised Philistines; like filthy Moabites or compromised Samaritans. But God paid the price of redemption to RECONCILE us to Him through the body of Jesus on the cross. And through that payment, God sees us as RIGHTEOUS in Christ and no longer as stained in our sin!

Third:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

3. Poverty into Plenty

“In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land.” (1:1)	“So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied , and she had some left over.” 2:14
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Boaz invited Ruth the foreigner to eat and drink with him. He offered her bread and wine. She ate and drank and was satisfied and even had lots of bread leftover. Does this remind you of anything?

Jesus invites us to come to him when we are weary and burdened so we can not only find REST for our souls but find LIFE abundant. We come to Jesus to FEAST. We eat His body and drink His blood as the nourishment our souls need.

The Redeemer Transforms Our

3. Poverty into Plenty

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; **whoever comes to me shall not hunger**, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." John 6:35

We come with nothing. We don't even have a quarter to buy a slice of bread. We are destitute beggars and Jesus not only gives us our daily bread, He gives us His own body as our bread! His body is real food, His blood is real drink. We feed on the gospel - we feed on Jesus. And when we learn to do that, we will never be hungry again, we will never be thirsty again. The Holy Spirit becomes in us a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Four:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

4. Death into Life

<p>"Both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband." (1:5)</p>	<p>And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." (4:17)</p>
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Act 1 was filled with death. Act 4 was brimming with life. Hold on to that, brothers and sisters, when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Death does not have the last word for the Christian. It is the last enemy to be defeated, but we know death will be defeated, overthrown by the Giver of Life - the irresistible power of the Resurrected King. Listen to this word about the future Redeemer in Ruth 4...

The Redeemer Transforms Our

4. Death into Life

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! **He shall be to you a restorer of life** and a nourisher of your old age." Ruth 4:14-15

Amen, may His name be renowned in Israel and all over the world! There is a Redeemer!
Ephesians 2:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

4. Death into Life

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world... but God... *made us alive together with Christ.*” Ephesians 2:1-2,5

Apart from Jesus we were not just lost, we were dead. We were not just confused, we were enslaved. And the only way for Jesus to rescue us from death was to descend INTO DEATH on our behalf. But the One who plunged into death for us also rose to victorious LIFE. And we who have been united with Jesus in His death will also be united with Him in His life. We have been made alive together WITH CHRIST, raised up and seated with Him in the heavenly places!

Fifth:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

5. Resentment into Rejoicing

“It is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.” (1:13)	“Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.” (4:16)
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Through her suffering, sweet Naomi became terribly bitter. Suffering will force us to a crossroads - it will **either make us BETTER or it will make us BITTER**. You will either walk by faith, trusting in the God who suffered for you; or you will walk in anger and resentment, questioning the Lord and His plans for you.

As we see the whole story we would want to plead with Naomi in chapter 1 to hold onto hope. But she had no way to see the glorious conclusion of chapter 4 except with the eyes of faith. How could she even imagine that she would hold in her lap the GRANDFATHER of the greatest king of Israel? There is no way she could have conceived of that.

But Steven Curtis Chapman sang it well - as believers we KNOW *there is going to be a GLORIOUS UNFOLDING*. “Just you wait and see... you will be amazed! You’ve just got to believe the story is so far from over.” Here is how James says it in the New Testament:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

5. Resentment into Rejoicing

“*Count it all joy*, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” James 1:2-3

For the believer in Jesus suffering should not make us bitter, it should make us better. We should be able to rejoice in suffering, knowing the Lord will use it to make us more like Him.

Six:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

6. Foreignness into Family

"She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." (2:6)	"Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife." (4:9)
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You can't miss the fact of Ruth's ancestry. Over and over she is called "The Moabite." But you can imagine after chapter 4 Boaz made sure no one called her that anymore, for she had become the wife of Boaz - an honored member of the tribe of Judah! We see this same reality in Ephesians:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

6. Foreignness into Family

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household." Ephesians 2:19

We were outsiders - shameful outcasts - but Jesus came outside the city to find us and brought us home at his own expense. So now we have been adopted as full members of the family of God! Those who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ!

Seven:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

7. Shame into Glory

"I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty." (1:21)	"A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David." (4:17)
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Sons represented blessing, provision and honor. When Naomi lost her husband and both sons, she was left empty - with nothing. She was vulnerable and disgraced. How could Naomi in chapter 1 imagine the outcome of chapter 4?

As we encourage one another in those chapter 1 moments, let's hold onto the promise that chapter 4 is coming! The woman who mourned a triply devastating loss in chapter one held the grandfather of King David in chapter 4. Her shame was transformed into glory!

This is even more gloriously true for us as believers! We who were covered and defined by our sin and shame have been covered by the blood of Jesus and united with Him! Eph. 2:

The Redeemer Transforms Our

7. Shame into Glory

“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”
Ephesians 2:21-22

In Romans 8 Paul says our present suffering is not worth comparing with the GLORY that will be revealed in us!

Naomi and Ruth had their lives completely changed from chapter one to chapter four. The key to that transformation was a man named Boaz, their Kinsman-Redeemer.

You and I have been totally transformed by Jesus Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer! Let's sing praise to the one who saved us and made us His own!